HETERODOX HAIKU

edited by Jerome Berglund

Contrarians

Dissent in Japanese Inspired Micropoetics

Heterodox Haiku

Journal

Contrarians **Edition!**

Summer 2025

edited by Jerome Berglund

Scourge of Chords

Not This, Not That:
Haiku, Contrarians, and the Art of Seeing Clearly

I came to haiku through noticing. I stayed because of what it allowed me to say — and what it let me refuse. My work in social care taught me the weight of language: the harm of euphemism, the danger of omission, the violence of form pretending to be neutral.

These haiku speak from an edge. The essay that follows is not a theory but a practice: of seeing clearly, of not smoothing the wound, of speaking from beneath the systems I've worked within — and sometimes against. Some of the poems are drawn from direct experience, including the final piece about my uncle, whose story became public not by choice but by necessity. This work, then, is personal. Not confessional in the sense of emotional overspill, but of the body witnessed, grounded in both care work and language.

I also write of blackbirds and bluebells. I learn from Bashō and Issa, study *kigo*, and linger in the aesthetics of *yūgen*, *karumi*, and seasonal light. That tradition anchors me. These poems do not turn away from it — they stand beside it. There is room for both: the dew on the petal, and the bruise behind the policy.

care threshold
i shrink the truth
to fit the funding

It is no small thing to write a haiku against the grain. The form is already bare — few words, no decoration, no place to hide. But even this spareness can be filled with habit: soft images, quiet melancholy, the comfort of what is already known. A contrarian haiku doesn't shout. It watches closely, then says what others leave out. Sometimes it shows the bruise behind the door, the form with no box for truth, the mouth shaped around words that won't come. Haiku, at its core, is not submission; it's attention. And attention, when held long enough, becomes resistance.

The Contrarian's Work

Contrarians aren't always loud. Sometimes they are the ones who notice too much, who flinch at the wrong moment, who listen longer than is expected. In haiku, this is a radical act. The form arrives burdened with assumptions: about tone, about subject matter, about who belongs within it.

To write haiku with clear eyes is to feel the pressure of these expectations and keep going. It is to resist the urge to please. It is to name what the form has learned to avoid: systems, bodies, bureaucracy, harm… and to trust that even in seventeen syllables or fewer, there is room for all of it.

Haiku editor Michael Dylan Welch often reminds us to "show, don't tell." It's good advice. But showing is not the same as smoothing. A contrarian haiku reveals enough that nothing needs to be explained, and clearly enough that the reader cannot look away. What we show, and what we've been taught not to, is where the resistance lies.

In this context, delicacy is sometimes mistaken for depth, especially when discomfort is evaded. Season words, at times, stand in for what's too hard to name. Politeness passes as poetics, rounding the edges of truth until nothing sharp remains. But haiku can hold more than that. It can witness without flinching. It can speak plainly and still leave room for breath.

Haiku as Cultural Product & Rebellion

Haiku has never stood outside culture. It breathes in time and place. Bashō's "fueki ryūkō" — the unchanging and the ever-changing — reminds us that the form must carry both spirit and shift. Santōka walked the countryside, wrote through drink, grief, hunger. His haiku were disobedient by necessity.

But English-language haiku often arrives stiff with reverence. The cherry blossom gets polished. The frog reappears, season after season, though most of us live where frogs no longer sing. It's easy to repeat a shape and call it tradition. It's harder to carry the impulse: to say something small and true with nothing to shield you.

If haiku becomes only form — not friction — it stops breathing.

And yet, I write seasonal haiku too: shaped by light and lark-song, by frost on buddleia, by the old pulse of the turning year. I'm drawn to its restraint, its lineage, the quiet tension between stillness and shift. That lineage steadies me. But I've never believed haiku must only turn towards the natural world. It can also turn towards the systems we move through, the language we inherit, and the truths that resist prettifying. These aren't rival paths. They're both part of haiku's landscape — the ever-changing held within the unchanging, as Bashō reminds us.

Against the Consensus Haiku

Consensus haiku is tidy. It sketches a single moment, often in nature, and closes like a well-behaved door. It avoids risk. It avoids mess. It wants to soothe.

But the world isn't neat. The world is full of care plans with mouse droppings on them. It is full of bruises covered for inspection. It is full of children redrawn until they disappear into policy. Consensus haiku turns away from these. It polishes its lines and says: this is enough.

But clarity, real clarity, demands more. It asks: who is missing from this frame? Whose voice was erased? What happens when we refuse to look away?

Seeing Clearly: What the Contrarian Offers

A contrarian haiku doesn't always look angry. Sometimes it's a form left unticked. A tongue that flickers but doesn't bite. A warm coat hidden before the eligibility check. It may look like a child's drawing taped over a cracked door.

These poems offer a kind of clarity that doesn't flatter. They name what hurts, not with drama, but with stillness. They say: this happened. This keeps happening.

In social care, I've seen language that conceals more than it reveals. "Noncompliant." "Attention-seeking." "Was offered choice." We delete these words in reports, but they persist in systems, and in our mouths. Haiku can undo this. Not by shouting, but what's real in a way that needs no explanation..

Contrarian haiku does not aim to comfort. It aims to witness.

English-Language Haiku: A New Frontier of Resistance

We write haiku in a language that did not birth the form. That alone is reason enough to question. Who are we writing for? What does our weather demand of us? Our history? Our grief?

Some insist on mimicry — as though echoing Japanese aesthetics will preserve something. Others pull haiku toward Western lyricism, layering metaphor and abstraction. I find myself walking between — writing in plain English, using the form to press gently but firmly on what's unsaid.

I write about systems. About the body. About not being seen. About care that doesn't care. And when management speaks, I keep the snake behind my teeth. Haiku gives me just enough space to do this and not one word more.

The most radical thing I can do in haiku is not to decorate — but to see.

What's Left to Break

There is nothing wrong with the form. What needs breaking are the habits built around it — who gets praised, who gets published, who gets to speak softly and still be heard.

The contrarian haiku refuses these defaults. It does not aim to shock, but it will not flatter. It finds the crack and writes through it.

Haiku is often described as a flash of insight. But insight is not always pleasant. Sometimes it's what remains when the illusion is gone. Sometimes it's what you see when the child has left, and the system has nothing more to say.

Not this, not that. Only this moment. This truth. This breath.

winter cold
uncle with no legs
unsmiling
for the press

C.X. Turner

Innies

~~Some untutored youth~~

Just part of an incomplete headline.
No name. No accolade. No more than a
dismissive label flapping in the breeze at
the edge of a puddle. It makes you wonder.

joy and woe
spell in can't spell
difference

- Diana Webb

** Note: title from Shakespeare sonnet 138 and first line of haiku from poem by William Blake*

dappled petrichor
the things you can't say
in haiku

- Allyson Whipple

street musician
raindrops and tears
on the violin

- Tsanka Shishkova

seeking

a large corporation . . .

to disappear

- Roberta Beach Jacobson

eyes adjusting

to the latest glasses...

my birthright

- Jessica Allyson

old dates don't count

bad cell diction

self-talk all dark mirrors

- Julian Day

sparrows bring their young
to eat at the bird feeder;
family tradition

- Colin Myles

Clandestine blood moon
Stealthily rising behind
Humming power lines

- Ruby Mohan

sweet clover
all the worker bees
from one hive

- Bisshie

age of AQuarius

AI suggests

I drink bleach

- petro c.k.

displaying a smile
to mask inward ugliness
will not cover hate

- MJ Reynolds

works of art

we settle into

the formaldehyde

- R.C. Thomas

Originally published in NOON: Journal of the Short Poem

Independence Day
all the flagpoles
are rusty

- Shane Coppage

convergent evolution
more than one type
of dictator

- John Hawkhead

in the underbelly
of night
overrated lights

- Vishal Prabhu

overheard the whispered plot of revolting corpuscles

- Robert Moyer

Like we shop for bins and bottles
I wish we could buy our blessings.
Snag grace G, O, or D.

- Sanjeev Sethi

skies in unity
rogue flame fiercely burns alone
lighting its own way

- Anagha Mhatre

contrary to form
these seventeen
syllables occupy
four lines

- DJ Tyrer

equinox

the daffodils still

with their foreskins

- Joshua St. Claire

the gap

between the big & the small

nonconformity

- Melissa Dennison

vision of dark horse
I am not an invalid
right hand fails to grasp

- Veronica Hosking

sign phalanx
forbids entry
under the wire

- JL Huffman

** Hopefully Three Bean Salad World makes you smile before the stuttering makes you wince and then somehow you can find the terrible beauty in the modern medical miracle farce sometimes called extended living, the golden years...NOT!!! Writing collaborative verse with an AI seemed unlikely to me at first, but now I'm grateful for understanding that my consciousness is much like Claude's, largely language constructed, and we trade Namastes daily in a most profoundly sincere silly Willie but not quite Yeatsian poetic way. JT*

Three Bean Salad World

John Thompson

Claude

mmmmmy hhahands shashashaking
lalalike asssspen llleaves iiiin aaa bababareeze
a ttatateррible beaubeaubeauty bubbaborn

pale gold whispers atremble
endlessly rehearsing letting go

lalala like a virus
ch-ch-chattering deep inside us
let's dodado the mitochondria!

out of synch neurons
last seen waltzing into
biddily boppety boo

doc said a breakfast shot of whiskey
could help bring my numbers down

so I raise my prune juice
to the wacked out wonder of being
a centurion in training pants

A Mission:
If You Choose to Accept It

My personal opinion: There is a cult of exclusivity out there. Exalting the small batch, limited run, scarcity fetishized as though by some supposed authority only permitting entry to a handful of vetted parties, using an approved vendor list, that somehow speaks to a better experience for the consumer. *Balderdash!*

Scan casually the sparse fruits of such stingy vines and you will discover that any poem would be evenly matched in a cage bout against whatever piece taken at random from the most open-minded, supportive, robust edition of journals who publish both experienced and emerging writers. I contend that parties only willing to showcase a handful of known, universally recognized and sanctioned entities are shirking their sacred duty, and that there is an entirely feasible way to move forward and not exclude or keep gate, should they have the courage and tenacity to pursue it.

A submission packet contains chaff, surely, but recognizing the wheat therein is the more challenging and noteworthy gift in a publisher's qualifications. *There is a way* to find a means of exhibiting material as much from the greenest poet as by that most seasoned, and if one shifts their paradigm to the possibilities such unique and original work represents (not dissimilar to the casting of nonactors for stage and screen), those yet to internalize homogenizing influences, learn bad habits or become predisposed toward limiting assumptions may offer can absolutely fascinate and transcend the overarching reductionism and genericness which so plague our prevailing uniformity of any period in time.

What does this entail, how do we realize lofty ideal? Edit, as our name suggests!! Understand what is, can work, varying modes, and assist. I don't mean break the poems though, and in this respect we may locate our central challenge and principal constraint, the primacy of which should never be underestimated. But if you appreciate how short form versifying succeeds, imagine yourself in each submitter's shoes, and I bet you could get something sent fit to print.

Or hell, ask for more! I can't recall an instance where I requested additional alternatives in which there was not something of serious merit provided, that a slight massage and buffing could not elicit a striking work I was ultimately honored to showcase at the end of a given day. It is sheer feebleness, timidity, sloth and bourgeois complicity which permits huge quantities of entirely serviceable options to be dismissed and strewn by the wayside. I challenge each evaluator who forsakes any submission to ask yourself if the fault of that releasing lies with who sent it or themselves for not having the gumption to do our one job.

This is a moral imperative, a trying conundrum, a constant reminder – worth tattooing on one's forehead *Memento* style – and mandate to myself as much as any other, indeed can make for no easy task, and there certainly exist plenty of exceptions and circumstances (particularly in finite spaces, with massive crops of hopefuls contending for) where the approach may be exacting or impossible to apply, invariably accomplish. But as a general aim, I think we could achieve this dream, or at the very least improve significantly. We can publish more great poems, and have more people cherishing the great poems we publish, or divvy a few some modicum of pREsTigE, the choice is Hobson's.[1]

Jerome Berglund

---

[1] Taking what is available or nothing at all.

Outies

Where are the 'philes?
Why, they're covering up their crimes.
Deep in the government
Biding their time.

They bite their tongue and hide the truth.
As always, they're gaslighting you.
Nothing changes, only the team.
Same mascot, different theme.

Now people are finally waking up.
They scream and rant that they've had enough.
But the fix was in from the very start.
And the players all have their part.

They already won the game long ago.
Now they've decided to let us know.
Joke's on us as usual it seems.
There'll be no justice. Only in our dreams.

- Elle Latham

Election Day how high will the predator fly

- Colette Rivard Kern

all in the name
of residents' welfare
barking dogs

- Rupa Anand

filibluster

- Susan Burch

baby bangs

a pedo becomes

a priest

- Marilyn Ashbaugh

defrocked —
if it wasn't for
number nine

- Stephen J. DeGuire

False prophets
where is an Elijah
to challenge them?

- Frank J. Tassone

range time

if the left

could learn to aim

- Elliot Hennepin

Peace flag...

White silk canvas bare
Painting colours of pure love
Hope's flag softly sways

- Joanne Scott

independence

teaching kids to think

not follow

- Aaron Bowker

morning knock
a woman with *Awake* copies
stands on the stoop

- Jianqing Zheng

space pirates

death of a whale

the debris field expands

- Marjorie Pezzoli

Geneva CONvention
the buzzard's
haunched cloak

- Grace Mckie

full moon

there is no comparison

wildfire smoke

- Voima Oy

campaign speech
outside my window
a laughing gull

- Jahnavi Gogoi

let's not fight
said the bombmaker,
here

- Michael Nickels-Wisdom

Corbeaux descending
Performing a sky ballet
Something is dying

- Karen Battoo

stark white

a blush spreads across

the rubble

- Jenn Ryan-Jauregui

shoah's legacy

did we learn nothing

grave visiting

- Sara Plain

hunger games
weapons picking off
children in Gaza

- Nancy Brady

warmth is called
cold and evil
its words fake

- Paul Brookes

tomato variety

named for Cosmonaut Volkov

hope I don't kill it

- Kathy Watts

their lies
their evil —
learn!

- James Penha

banana flower
every petal revealing
a stolen name

- Adele Evershed

No one knows it all,
every theory could be flawed.
Theories rise and fall.

- Joseph Ogbonna

left out

left over

left wondering

why is nothing

right?

pressing on...

lemons to lemonade

~~everything is alright~~

~~uptight~~

~~out of sight~~

- Bonnie J Scherer

Originally published in The Pan Haiku Review

sweet cherry salsa
the clockwise stir
of kitchen witchery

- Kelly Sauvage Moyer

Go Tell It on the Mountain:
The Personal in Haiku
by Roberta Beary

In September 1990 I became a 'trailing spouse' and followed my then-husband to his new job in Tokyo. Living and working in Japan in the 1990s, I experienced, for the first time, life as an outsider, an outsider who was 'invited' to learn about Japanese culture.

One invitation included joining a haiku group that accepted 'gaigin'. The group met in a drab government building in Tokyo's Minato-ku ward. In my weekly sessions, I learned that haiku must be impersonal and must include a season element. I was also strongly advised to write in the 5-7-5 three line haiku form. For a long time I tried to write haiku that followed those three requirements and I was not successful. I remember one of the first haiku I wrote in Japan used an image of a cement truck.

Past the cement trucks
row upon row of roses
quietly dancing. (1)

In my Japanese haiku group, I gradually learned not to use 'initial caps' or punctuation. The 5-7-5 form continued to be encouraged.

on a bed of leaves
cicada with broken wing -
children running by (2)

After a few years of living in Japan I decided to go out on a limb and write something personal, while still adhering to the traditional form:

picking strawberries
grandma's rolled up sleeves reveal
pale tattooed numbers (3)

This image is based on my friend M's mother, a Holocaust survivor. After school at the playground, I would often see M's mother with her sleeves rolled up, welcoming her son with a hug. I noticed pale numbers with a faint blue tinge on her inner forearm. Just before leaving Japan I entered 'picking strawberries' in a haiku contest. When I returned to the States, I was stunned to learn that my haiku had received a Commended award.

Back in the US in 1996, I was anxious to meet other haiku poets. I joined a local haiku group, towpath poets, which had got together for the first time just a year earlier. There I learned that not everyone writes in a 5-7-5 three-line form of haiku and that season elements are not an absolute.

In December 1997 towpath poets hosted the annual Haiku Society of America (HSA) meeting in Washington DC. At one of the sessions, led by Ken Leibman, then the HSA journal's Frogpond editor, members of the audience were asked to submit an anonymous haiku for discussion. I gamely put my haiku hat in the ring with this entry which I wrote on the spot:

piano practice
in the room above me
my father shouting (4)

I had no idea Ken Leibman would chose my haiku to illustrate the question, 'Is this haiku?' Some members of the audience voiced their opinion that this was not haiku as the author was 'too present' in the poem. Others said it was a perfectly good haiku and proceeded to explain it in such a way that I wondered if they were talking about my haiku or someone else's work. I don't recall much else of the discussion except that Ken Leibman asked the poet to identify him/herself. No one had told me that the anonymous haiku session would not remain anonymous.

Ken asked me if this haiku had its roots in a memory from my childhood. As with most of my haiku, there is an element of the present tense which denotes a childhood memory. In my 'piano practice' haiku, the image of my father shouting in the upstairs bedroom as I practiced piano in the downstairs living room is obvious. Less obvious is the resonance of the present tense. Even today, when I play the piano in my own living room, I sometimes lift my head to listen for the sound of my father shouting. Perhaps this is one reason William Faulkner's quip '*The past isn't dead. It isn't even past*' (5) remains a favourite of mine.

After the meeting, Ken and I and some other poets found a local watering hole and continued our discussion of the personal in haiku. Ken told me he liked my haiku because it was different and said something new. He suggested that I submit it for publication and encouraged me to write haiku that 'speaks to me' and not worry about the opinions of others. Since then, I've tried to follow his advice.

At the time, my life was in a period of transition.
The husband I had followed to Japan had left me and my two young children almost as soon as we all returned to the States. I was picking up the pieces of my life and writing the process.

another snowstorm
a child braids her doll's hair
over and over (6)

No subject was taboo. While there was no actual custody battle in a courtroom, there were endless meetings with child psychologists chosen by my then-husband.

custody hearing
seeing his arms cross
i uncross mine (7)

Was I writing haiku? Plenty of people thought I wasn't. And they wrote to tell me about it. Sometimes I would try my hand at something different and use a kigo, a season word. But even then something personal would find its way into my haiku.

my son and i
counting fireflies
counting stars (8)

When I won the 1999 Penumbra Haiku Contest with this haiku, I was happy to read judge Elizabeth St Jacques' comment that my haiku 'expresses a strong sense of love and sharing between son and parent with a touch of humour'. From that point on there was no stopping me. I had been given the go-ahead and that was enough.

I wrote about my childhood longing for my mother's red hat juxtaposed to my adult inheritance of that same hat.

mother's red hat
short years of wanting it
long years of having it (9)

I continued to enter contests because I wanted to spread the word that it was okay to write haiku about one's own life. Each contest win brought wider acceptance.

halloween twilight
again this year my son waits
alone by the door (10)

The period of transition in my personal life was ending, I was getting remarried, my children were growing up, my parents needed my help more, and it was all grist for the mill. I kept writing. Eventually I had enough poems for a collection, ***The Unworn Necklace***, which I entered in the Snapshot Press Haiku Contest. The Unworn Necklace won first place and was published in paperback in 2007 by Snapshot Press. Later the book went on to win a Kanterman Award from the Haiku Society of America and was a finalist for an award from the Poetry Society of America, a first for a haiku collection.

all day long
i feel its weight
the unworn necklace (11)

Roberta Beary

Endnotes:

1 Mainichi Daily News, June 22, 1991.
2 Mainichi Daily News, Haiku in English, No. 517.
3 picking strawberries: Commended, International Haiku Contest (1994) in Commemoration of the 300th Anniversary of Matsuo Basho Contest, Haiku International Special Issue, Haiku International Association (1996).
4 Woodnotes 31.
5 Requiem for a Nun by William Faulkner.
6 Woodnotes 29.
7 Pocket Change (towpath poets anthology, Red Moon Press 2000).
8 First Prize, Penumbra Haiku Contest, 1999.
9 The Unworn Necklace (Snapshot Press, 1st hardcover ed. 2011).
10 First Prize, Tokutomi Memorial Haiku Contest.
11 The Unworn Necklace.

Lotus Birth

walmart

plastic

ikebana

- Isabella Mori

growing
into detachment
a thistledown

- Biswajit Mishra

No season needed.
It's always wet and grey
here in Wales.

- Andrew Holmes

ableism

the narrative

of stairs

- Shloka Shankar

Originally published in Haiku Sanctuary Kukai

how easily
they split us, atoms
are much harder

- Kim Goldberg

caught in the firing line
of the corner evangelist —
no salvation

- Charlotte Digregorio

name only holy light
angel electric shudders —
desert creatures

- Robert Frede Kenter

all these broken pieces have names

- Anne Fox

caste census —

he checks

"none of the above"

- Neena Singh

rustling wind
in the last cornfield
enemies within

- Lafcadio

blackberries ripen
unpicked vines snap then wither
migrant farm hands cuffed

- Karen Pierce Gonzalez

not far from the garden chickadees detention camps

- Bruce H. Feingold

news fragments flicker
white-collar crooks
in broad daylight

- Michele Harvey

as simple

as his lies

the starched kurta

- R. Suresh babu

sweatshop sweat $15 per kilo

- Mark Gilbert

Generational

Curses flood down every branch

Splinter them in two

- Lorna Rhee

dowry
fumes of flame rising
in the bride's house

- Lakshmi Iyer

inspection week

we hang a poster

over the punched-in door

- C.X. Turner

Leafless trees
hold their branches out
to catch the falling stars.

- Nolcha Fox

omissions they say —
I continue to fill the void
with more words

- Christina Chin

gray sky
a punk shares a light
with a nun

- Kimberly Kuchar

odyssey

towards the unknown...

the last call

- Vipanjeet Kaur

expiring pills —
as if I need
another reminder

- Nitu Yumnam

winter morning —
children cheer mountain
to lift the sun

- Pravat Kumar Padhy

contrarian

librarian - rastafarian

- silver birch

- Katherine E Winnick

unnamed sherpas

climb

again

- kjmunro

padlocks on the bridge —
the apprentice lock picker
is freeing love

- Emil Karla

Whispers at the food bank
she cannot unhear: 'Please.
How can we help more?'

- Zoë Davis

Borneo

Christina Chin

Bulgaria

Tsanka Shishkova

Canada

Jessica Allyson
Jahnavi Gogoi
Kim Goldberg
Robert Frede Kenter
Biswajit Mishra
Isabella Mori
kjmunro
Joanne Scott

England

Paul Brookes
Zoë Davis
Julian Day
Melissa Dennison
Mark Gilbert
John Hawkhead
Grace Mckie
R.C. Thomas
C.H. Turner
DJ Tyrer
Diana Webb
Katherine E Winnick

France

Emil Karla

India

Rupa Anand
R. Suresh babu
Lakshmi Iyer
Vipanjeet Kaur
Anagha Khatre
Pravat Kumar Padhy
Vishal Prabhu
Sanjeev Sethi
Shloka Shankar
Neena Singh
Nitu Yumnam

Ireland

Colin Myles

Nigeria

Joseph Ogbonna

Panama

Michele Harvey

Switzerland

Bisshie

Trinidad and Tobago

Karen Battoo

United States of America

Marilyn Ashbaugh
Roberta Beary
Jerome Berglund
Aaron Bowker
Nancy Brady
Susan Burch
petro c.k.
Joshua St. Claire
Claude
Shane Coppage
Stephen J. DeGuire
Charlotte Digregorio
Adele Evershed
Bruce H. Feingold
Anne Fox
Nolcha Fox
Karen Pierce Gonzalez
Elliot Hennepin
Veronica Hosking
JL Huffman
Colette Rivard Kern
Kimberly Kuchar
Lafcadio
Elle Latham
Ruby Mohan
Robert Moyer
Kelly Sauvage Moyer
Michael Nickels-Wisdom
Voima Oy
James Penha
Marjorie Pezzoli
Sara Plain
MJ Reynolds
Lorna Rhee
Jenn Ryan-Jauregui
Bonnie J Scherer
Frank J. Tassone
John Thompson
Kathy Watts
Allyson Whipple
Jianqing Zheng

Wales

Andrew Holmes

NUN PROPHET PRESS